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ABSTRACT

The passage of Public Law 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act) in 1975 had a great impact on the role of school psychologists. One of the controversial requirements of Public Law 94-142 alluded to the involvement of school psychologists in Individualized Education Program (IEP) development. This study was undertaken to obtain general information about the involvement of school psychologists in IEP development and meeting attendance. It also evaluated three factors that may play a role in school psychologists' involvement in the IEP development process: years of training or experience; work load; and usefulness of information provided. Questionnaires were completed by 214 members of the National Association of School Psychologists. The findings revealed that school psychologists were involved in IEP planning and consistently ranked third to the special education teacher and parents in IEP meeting attendance for both original and re-evaluations. School psychologists reported being less involved with the development of short-term than long-term goals in special education. (Contains 30 references and 6 tables.) (NB)

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School Psychologists in IEP Development

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Running Head: School Psychologist and IEP's

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study was to gain insight into the general makeup of the IEP committee and the role of the school psychologist in IEP development. Research data were collected via a national survey of members of the National Association of School Psychologists (N = 214). In addition, to providing a snapshot of school psychologist's involvement in IEP's, the study specifically examined questions of training and experience, work load, and use of assessment information as they related to the IEP participation of school psychologists.

The passage of Public Law 94-142 (The Education of all Handicapped Children Act) in 1975 had a great impact on the role of school psychologists. One of the controversial requirements of PL 94-142 alluded to the involvement of school psychologists in Individualized Education Program (IEP) development. The minimum requirements for involvement were delineated in the 1977 Federal Register, which stated:

> For a handicapped child who has been evaluated for the first time, the public agency shall ensure: (1) that a member of the evaluation team participates in the meeting; or (2) that the representative of the public agency, the child's teacher, or some other person is present at the meeting, who is knowledgeable about the evaluation procedures used with the child and is familiar with the results of the evaluation.

While participation of psychologists in the IEP development process was not explicitly stated in these guidelines, the statement was intended to set a minimum requirement that could be further articulated by individual states as needed.

We further see the vagueness of the psychologists' role in educational program planning by the definition in the Federal Register of "Psychological services." It is stated in section 121a.13 of PL 94-142 on "Psychological services" under "Related services" that:

(8) "Psychological services" includes:

(i) Administering psychological and educational tests and other assessment procedures;

(ii) Interpreting assessment results;

(iii) Obtaining, integrating and interpreting information about child behavior and conditions relating to learning;

(iv) Consulting with other staff members in planning school programs to meet the special needs of children as indicated by psychological tests, interviews, and behavioral evaluations; and

(v) Planning and managing a program of psychological services, including psychological counseling for children and parents.

While the law does not mandate school psychologist membership in IEP development conferences, Kabler, Carlton, and Sherwood (1981) have described the school psychologist as an essential multi-disciplinary team member who should assist in the writing of tentative and formal IEP's. Let us turn to the available research on the psychologist's involvement in the development of the IEP.

IEP Conferences and the School Psychologist

Careful examination of the literature reveals a paucity of information about the school psychologist's role and influence in IEP development. Ford and Migles (1979) found that teachers rate school psychologists high with regard to importance for psychodiagnostic testing with specific recommendations for remedial education programming and remedial case consultation.

Research conducted by Gilliam and Coleman (1981) on participants in IEP meetings focused on rankings of the IEP member roles and the influence and contributions of each role/member. The school psychologist was perceived to have the most influence at the meeting only following the special education teacher, in pre-meeting importance. The suggestion was made that those participants offering "hard" data may have been seen as more influential, and therefore as contributing information more frequently. The actual contribution and influence, as determined by post-meeting follow up ranked the school psychologist third.

An observational analysis of 14 IEP conferences was conducted by Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull and Curry (1980), focused on three school districts in North Carolina: one rural, one suburban, and one in a university setting. A coding instrument was used that enabled the observers to specify at two minute intervals the topic being discussed, the

speaker, and the recipient. Additional information included all participants by role and the starting and ending times of the conference. A conference satisfaction questionnaire was completed by all participants immediately following each conference. Results indicated that an evaluator (psychologist) attended 29% of total conferences. Total citations of the evaluation was only 11% of total citations and the mean speaking citations of the evaluator per conference attended was 2.0. Interestingly, of the 14 conferences observed, in only one instance was the meeting actually devoted to specifying goals and objectives jointly between the parent and the educators. The proceedings of the IEP conference observed in this study were characterized by a resource teacher taking the initiative to review an already developed IEP with the parent.

Bagnato (1980) conducted an evaluation of teachers' abilities to translate psychological data into IEP terms. Data from 48 early childhood teachers supported the notion that reporting of "specific areas of strengths and skill deficits in clear, behavioral terms...enable the teacher to more accurately select individual objectives from the curriculum that match the child's current level of functioning" (p. 555). Similarly, Bagnato (1980) urged the use of "developmental ceilings, functional levels, skill sequences and instructional needs upon which assessment/curriculum linkages can be constructed to form the IEP" (p. 555).

The school psychologists' involvement and attitudes toward IEP development has not been tapped. The objectives of this study are to provide general information about the involvement of school psychologists in IEP development and meeting attendance. In addition, the study evaluates three factors that may play a role in school psychologists involvement in the IEP development process. These factors are: 1) years of training or experience; 2) work load; and 3) usefulness of information provided.

More specifically, it is proposed that those school psychologists who have more training and experience would more likely be involved in IEP development. Similarly, school psychologists whom have too heavy a work load (too many evaluations to do), or

do not believe that the information they have provided from the psychoeducational assessment would be used, would more likely shun the IEP process.

Method

Respondents

A total of 500 questionnaires were mailed to a randomly selected sample of the 1988 membership directory of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP). A total of 283 questionnaires were returned (56.6% return rate). Among the surveys returned, 13.8% were eliminated from the sample because they were either not fully completed or the recipients were not currently practicing school psychology. The usable survey sample consisted of 214 (42.8%) subjects with 130 females (60.7%) and 84 males (39.3) representing 42 states.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the sample. The sex distribution was consistent with a recent survey of school psychologists conducted by Fisher, Jenkins, and Crumbley (1986), as was number of years practiced and level of education. The region of practice distribution was consistent with 1988 NASP directory reports. An examination of respondents assessment load revealed an average of 86 psychoeducational evaluations conducted each year with 68 percent of the evaluations leading to eligibility of special services.

Instrument

Given the exploratory nature of the study, a questionnaire was developed to evaluate current involvement of school psychologists in IEP development meetings. A

complete copy of the survey is available from the first author. The survey consisted of three parts.

Part I consisted of demographic information about the respondent and their position to be used in making statistical comparisons. Data were requested regarding the number of schools served, number of hours worked per week, number of psychoeducational evaluations conducted each year, course work specifically oriented at IEP development, and general make-up of the IEP committee at original and reevaluation meetings.

Part II assessed the facts, beliefs and attitudes regarding degree of participation in IEP meeting discussions, extent of involvement of planning IEP goals and objectives, extent of contributions of the students' strengths, weaknesses, functional levels of students, and perceptions of the need for school psychologists to be involved in IEP meetings. See Table 1 for the questions 25 through 37 (Part II). Part III of the survey focused on attendance at original and reeevaluation IEP development meetings of children with varying handicapping conditions. See Table 2 for the question asked in Part III.

Insert Table 2 about here

The questionnaire format was divided into three sections, requiring multiple choice, 1-5 likert-type rankings, or short answer responses. Completion of the questionnaire required approximately fifteen minutes. Questionnaires were individually returned to the investigator via postage paid envelopes, and all respondents were offered a summary of the results. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the instrument accompanied each questionnaire. Questions were derived from investigation of literature and specific hypotheses to be tested.

Insert Table 3 about here

Results

An examination of the proceedings at IEP meetings shown in Table 4 revealed that the special education teacher is generally the most responsible for setting up and directing IEP meetings and actually writing of the IEP. Psychologist responses indicated that a special education teacher is present at IEP meetings on original cases 91 percent of the time, whereas the psychologist is present about 78 percent of the time. This is significantly more than was mentioned in Goldstein, Strickland, Turnbull and Curry (1980).On re-evaluation cases, the psychologist is present only 61 percent of the time. Eighty three percent of the respondents had no training developing IEPs, even though they were frequently called upon to direct the IEP meeting (19%).

Insert Table 4 about here

The descriptive statistics of Part II of the study are shown in Table 5. It can be seen that school psychologists are involved in discussions about student planning (Question #25), and believe that the information they provide is used in developing the IEP (Questions #26, 28, 29, 33, 34, 35). However, school psychologists seem to feel they are less involved in goal development, and especially less for short-term goals (Questions #31 & 32). Finally, it appears that school psychologists do not have a strong need to be more involved in IEP development (Question #37).

Insert Table 5 about here

Table 6 summarizes the information on school psychologists' attendance at IEP meeting by type of evaluation and handicapping condition. These data show that school

psychologists are more frequently involved in IEP meetings from original evaluations for behavior disordered, learning disabled and educably mentally handicapped students that any other handicapping conditions. Less frequent attendance is found for reevaluation IEPs for all handicapping conditions, even though attendance remains higher the three handicapping conditions mentioned above.

Insert Table 6 about here

Do training and experience increase the likelihood of involvement in the IEP process? For the respondents in this study the answer seems to be no. Correlations between Question #25 (participation in IEP meetings) and years of practice and level of training were non-significant at the .05 level.

Does work load play a role in attendance in IEP meetings? Correlations between the number of psychoeducational evaluations conducted during the past school year and ratings of involvement in discussions at IEP meetings (Question #25) were also non-significant at the .05 level. This suggests that the number of psychoeducational evaluations (an indicator of workload) is not related to IEP participation.

Are school psychologists more likely to become involved in the IEP development process if they feel their assessment data, conclusions, or recommendation will be used? The answer to this question seems to be yes. A significant, but moderate correlation (r=.574) was found between the respondents ratings of involvement in IEP meetings (Question #25) and their feelings that their assessment information is used in developing the IEP (Question #26).

Discussion

The result of the survey provided interesting information about school psychologists involved in the IEP process. School psychologists are involved in IEP

planning and consistently rank third to the special education teacher and parents in IEP meeting attendance for both original and re-evaluations. This self-perception of themselves by school psychologists is consistent with Gilliam and Coleman's (1981) study in which participants in IEP meetings rated school psychologists high in terms of importance at meetings. Interestingly, school psychologists are less involved with the development of short-term than long-term goals in special education. This finding is particularly intriguing when the data collected during psychoeducational assessments may be more amenable to short term rather than long-term plans.

School psychologists are more frequently involved in IEP meetings for new or original evaluations likely because less is known about these students than for those students who are already enmeshed in special education. Other factors that may play a role in IEP involvement by school psychologists are; the finding that the IEP is frequently written prior to the meeting, little formal training in IEP development, and the degree to which their psychoeducational information is used in IEP development. In fact, these factors may be implicated in the general assertion from the sample that there is little need for psychologists to become more involved in the IEP process.

This initial look at school psychologists involvement in IEP highlights the commitment of school psychologists to appropriate educational programming for the students they serve. However, these data raise additional questions as well. For example, why do school psychologists feel no need to be more involved in the process?, What role do school psychologists actually play in IEP meetings?, etc. Further research, perhaps using qualitative methods, may provide us with answers that may help us to enhance our preservice or inservice training efforts.

While we were encouraged by the similarities between our sample and the NASP membership in toto, it must be noted that all school psychologists are NASP members. Therefore, caution should be used in attempting to generalize these results to the population of school psychologists. In addition, the degree to which volunterism may have provided a

biased sample is not known. As a result, caution regarding the use of these results should be considered until more is known about the non-responders.

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Table 1

Characteristics of the Sample

	N	% of Sample		N	% of Sample
Age			**Level of Education***		
Below 25	3	1.4	Master's	104	48.6
26-30	11	5.1	Specialist	41	19.2
31-35	40	18.7	Doctorate	45	24.3
41-45	44	20.6	Other	22	10.3
46-50	18	8.4			
51-55	15	7.0	**Years Practiced**		
Over 55	22	10.3	Below 1	4	1.9
			1-4	46	21.5
			5-9	52	24.3
Gender			10-14	53	24.8
Male	84	39.3	15-19	32	15.0
Female	130	60.7	20-24	18	8.4
			Over 24	9	4.2
Years at Current Position					
Below 1	21	9.8	**Number of Schools Served***		
1-4	69	32.2	1-2	58	10.3
5-9	47	22.0	3-4	71	33.2
10-14	46	21.5	5-6	38	17.8
15-19	20	9.3	7-8	21	9.8
20-24	11	5.1	9-10	7	3.3
Over 24	--	--	Over 10	13	6.1

* missing data

Table 1 (continued)

Characteristics of the Sample (continued)

	N	% of Sample		N	% of Sample
Region			Hours Worked per Week*		
Northeast	52	24.3	0-20	9	4.2
Southeast	44	20.6	21-39	66	30.8
N. Central	48	22.4	Over 39	137	64.0
W. Central	27	12.6			
West	43	20.1			
			Grades Served		
			Pre/K-6	26	12.1
			Pre/K-9	35	16.4
			Pre/K-12	93	43.5
			6-12	9	4.2
			Other	51	23.8

* missing data

Table 2
Questions 25 through 37 of the Survey Instrument (Part II)

TO WHAT EXTENT... (Read each statement carefully and then circle the appropriate number from the group of numbers following each question that corresponds best to your situation.

not at all	a small extent	some extent	a great extent	a very great extent
1	2	3	4	5

TO WHAT EXTENT...

* 25...are you involved in the discussions of planning student programs at IEP meetings?
26...do you feel your assessment information is used in making IEP's?
27...are IEP's already written before the formal IEP meeting?
28...is the data you obtain from test results amenable to making useful instructional goals for the IEP?
29...do IEP objectives follow strengths and/or weaknesses found in your assessment?
30...do you give specific recommendations for remedial educational programming?
31...do you help develop IEP goals?
32...do you help develop IEP short term objectives?
33...do you provide information on specific skills and observable behaviors that may be helpful in planning the IEP?
34...do you provide information on developmental ceilings and functional levels that can be useful for program planning?
35...do you explain learning styles of children that may be useful in making IEP recommendations?
36...do you believe school psychologists need to be involved in IEP formulation?
37...would you like to be more involved in IEP development?

* The Likert scale numbers under each question were deleted to create this table.

Table 3

Question 38 - Attendance at IEP meetings (Part III)

38. PLACE THE APPROPRIATE NUMBER NEXT TO THE BLANK THAT CORRESPONDS TO YOUR ATTENDANCE AT IEP MEETINGS FOR THESE SPECIFIC DISABILITIES. PLEASE PLACE A NUMBER IN EACH BLANK.

1	2	3	4	5
Never Attend	Infrequently Attend	Sometimes Attend	Often Attend	Always Attend

ORIGINAL	RE-EVALUATION	
_____	_____	Behavior Disordered
_____	_____	Gifted
_____	_____	Learning Disabled
_____	_____	EMH
_____	_____	Language, Speech, Hearing, Vision
_____	_____	Physical, Other Health Impaired
_____	_____	TMH
_____	_____	Other (Please Explain)

Table 4

Psychoeducational Evaluations and IEP Data

Number of Completed Psychoeducational Evaluations per year	Percent of those students evaluated deemed eligible for special services
Mean = 86.3	Mean = 68.2
SD = 50.0	SD = 23.5
Range = 10-350	Range = 5-100
Mode = 100.0	Mode = 80.0

Persons generally present at IEP meetings

	Original		Re-evaluations	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Special Education Teacher	195	91	205	95
Parent	202	94	181	85
Regular Education Teacher	146	68	89	42
Principal	128	59	84	39
Psychologist	166	78	131	61
Chapter 1 Reading Teacher	15	7	10	5
Speech Pathologist	79	37	51	24
Counselor	58	27	39	18
Special Education Supervisor	48	22	45	21
Assistant Principal	13	6	18	8
Special Education Consultant	30	14	18	8
Other	48	22	27	13

Table 4 (continued)

Psychoeducational Evaluations and IEP Data

	N	% of Sample
Respondents with IEP Training		
Yes	36	17
No	178	83
Who arranges IEP Meetings?*		
Case Manager	22	10
Spec. Ed. Personnel	25	12
Psychologist	22	10
Reg. Ed. Teacher	15	7
Principal	16	8
Spec. Ed. Teacher	32	15
Other	40	19
Who directs IEP meetings?*		
Case Manager	18	7
Spec. Ed Personnel	26	12
Psychologist	40	19
Reg. Ed. Teacher	17	18
Special Ed. Teacher	43	20
Other	63	29
Who writes the IEP?*		
Case Manager	14	7
Spec. Ed. Personnel	7	3
Reg. Ed. Teacher	39	18
Spec. Ed. Teacher	81	38
Other	65	30

* missing data

Table 5

Average ratings for questions 25-37 (Refer to questionnaire in Appendix I for questions).

	Mean	Mode	SD
QUESTION 25	3.346	4.000	1.195
QUESTION 26	3.650	4.000	.985
QUESTION 27	3.146	3.000	1.353
QUESTION 28	3.451	3.000	.871
QUESTION 29	3.526	4.000	.954
QUESTION 30	3.486	3.000	.977
QUESTION 31	2.944	3.000	1.137
QUESTION 32	2.509	2.000	1.108
QUESTION 33	3.804	4.000	.866
QUESTION 34	3.495	4.000	1.055
QUESTION 35	3.746	4.000	.982
QUESTION 36	3.745	4.000	1.012
QUESTION 37	2.818	3.000	1.302

Note: SD = Standard Deviation. The rankings for these include Not at all = 1; Small extent = 2; Some extent = 3; Great extent = 4; Very great extent = 5.

Table 6

Average ratings for question 38 - Attendance at IEP meetings for various handicapping conditions on original and reevaluations.

	ORIGINAL	REEVALUATION
Behavior	Mean - 4.376	Mean - 3.887
Disordered	Mode - 5.000	Mode - 5.000
	SD - 1.162	SD - 1.348
Gifted	Mean - 1.930	Mean - 1.609
	Mode - 1.000	Mode - 1.000
	SD - 1.433	SD - 1.222
Learning	Mean - 4.201	Mean - 3.553
Disabled	Mode - 5.000	Mode - 5.000
	SD - 1.185	SD - 1.361
Educable	Mean - 4.119	Mean - 3.517
Mentally	Mode - 5.000	Mode - 5.000
Handicapped	SD - 1.301	SD - 1.454
Language,	Mean - 2.495	Mean - 2.217
Speech, Hearing	Mode - 2.000	Mode - 1.000
Impaired	SD - 1.350	SD - 1.244
Physical	Mean - 3.022	Mean - 2.624
Other Health	Mode - 5.000	Mode - 1.000
Impaired	SD - 1.572	SD - 1.586

Note: SD = Standard Deviation. The rankings for these included Never attend = 1; Infrequently attend = 2; Sometimes attend = 3; Often attend = 4; Always attend = 5.